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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the current situation of international activities in further education colleges in the United Kingdom. Surveys of over 180 colleges revealed that nearly three-fourths referred to international activity in their strategic plans; only 41 percent had a written policy. Benefits of an international dimension were broadening experience for students, curriculum enrichment, increasing job prospects, and a recruitment tool. Cost, European Union bureaucracy, maintaining links, and lack of student interest were cited as drawbacks. A closer look at 11 colleges in England and 1 in Scotland identified the following rationales for involvement in international links: added value, support for local economic development and innovation, and improved profile of vocational education. The following models of international partnership were identified: exporting the curriculum, recruiting overseas students, vocational language training, English as a Foreign language; curriculum niche markets, partnerships for curriculum enhancement, and curriculum innovation projects. Issues that determined management structures were noted: a need to provide a stimulus and focus for growth and quality control; integration with college structures; internal communication systems; need for cooperation; and funding. To develop international links, colleges needed support and guidelines for curriculum integration, support from validating bodies, funding, a professional rationale, and ways to encourage student mobility. (Appendixes include guidelines for international work and a list of eight organizational information sources.) (YLB)

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FEDA Further Education Development Agency

ED 414 432

The shrinking world: international links with FE

Val Davis and Ann Simpson

FE matters

CE 075 334

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International SERVICES

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

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FE matters

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International Services

is a fast developing area of FEDA's operations and provides the following services for the FE sector:

- a UK European Officers' Network
- delegations and study tours to other countries
- research into colleges' international activities
- publications
- exchange programmes
- seminars and conferences on European and international activities both at Blagdon and other venues in the UK
- consultancy and commissioned training on internationalising college activities

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North London Colleges European Network

Plymouth College

Ridge Danyers College

Park Lane College, Leeds

Scarborough Sixth Form College

Warwickshire College

Contents

Key messages 4

1. Context 5

2. Current situation 6

Introduction 6
Strategic approaches and management responsibilities 6
Benefits and drawbacks 7
European activity 9
Eastern Europe 11
Beyond Europe 11
Working abroad 12
Links for the future 13
Conclusions from the survey 14

3. Learning from experience and good practice 15

Strategic issues 15
Different models 16
Management structures 19
Using IT for international links 22
Lessons learned and examples 23

Appendix 1: Guidelines for international work 27

Appendix 2: Useful information 28

Key messages

- A mention in the strategic plan is not enough: an international business plan should be drawn up.
- Colleges need to form a close working relationship with awarding bodies when setting up programmes abroad.
- The flexible provision of language training for students and staff is essential; funding of this provision remains a problem.
- More successful and profitable international activity is achieved by collaboration with other schools, colleges and universities.
- The physical exchange of students is not always successful; virtual exchanges using new technologies can be more fruitful.
- International activity should be seen as valuable staff development for all staff not just the enthusiastic few.
- There needs to be professional recognition of international work through the development of a qualification for staff.
- The work cannot be done in a few hours of a teacher's time; dedicated units repay their setting up costs. They can also be shared between institutions.
- Colleges should use the assistance available from bodies such as the Central Bureau.
- Colleges which expect this type of work to be self-financing or income generating from the outset are unlikely to achieve quality standards.
- Money must be invested in the pastoral care of overseas students if recruitment is to be sustained.
- International work does not always have to be the province of modern language staff; a skills audit for the international experience of all staff would prove useful.

1. Context

In the last decade the world has become smaller as global communications have improved and a student in Birmingham can communicate with a student in Hong Kong or South Africa by e-mail. Someone starting to work for a company down the road can find themselves being sent to the parent company in Japan or Australia. There is, therefore, an increasing need for colleges to provide international experience for their students and staff and to play their part in the local economy which is inextricably linked with a global economy.

In curriculum terms there is a worldwide trend towards the competence-based qualifications in which the UK is a world leader. Colleges, therefore, have a valuable export in their expertise in implementing these learner-centred qualifications.

With the implementation of the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union now has a far greater impact on education and training and on lifelong learning. Transnational projects funded by the European Union are hard work but very rewarding for all the partners concerned and especially valuable for the professional development of college staff.

UK university education has long been admired throughout the world and FE colleges which can offer higher level diplomas and progression to local universities have something to sell, especially as the student support services on offer can be more individualised than in the larger universities.

It was against this background that FEDA decided to investigate the extent of international activities already undertaken in our FE colleges. It was decided to investigate the sector as a whole by survey and then to use the experience of a selection of colleges who were active in the international field to draw out issues that needed addressing and advice on how to address them. The sample included a network of colleges, two sixth form colleges, urban and rural colleges, and a college in Scotland.

This report therefore opens with a summary of the current situation, based on survey evidence from over 180 colleges and examining links in Europe and beyond. It then looks more closely at the work of 11 colleges from all over England, and one from Scotland examining their rationale, models of work and good practice. The appendices contain guidelines for international work and details of useful organisations.

2. Current situation

Introduction

In order to establish the kind of international support UK colleges could look for from FEDA for, it was necessary to survey the extent of colleges' own international experience and activities. Before conducting the survey the impression was that there were some key players in international activities but it was difficult to ascertain the level of activity of most colleges. This research also enabled us to identify good practice and thus be able to call on particular colleges when FEDA's many overseas contacts are looking for partners.

The aims of this project were to:

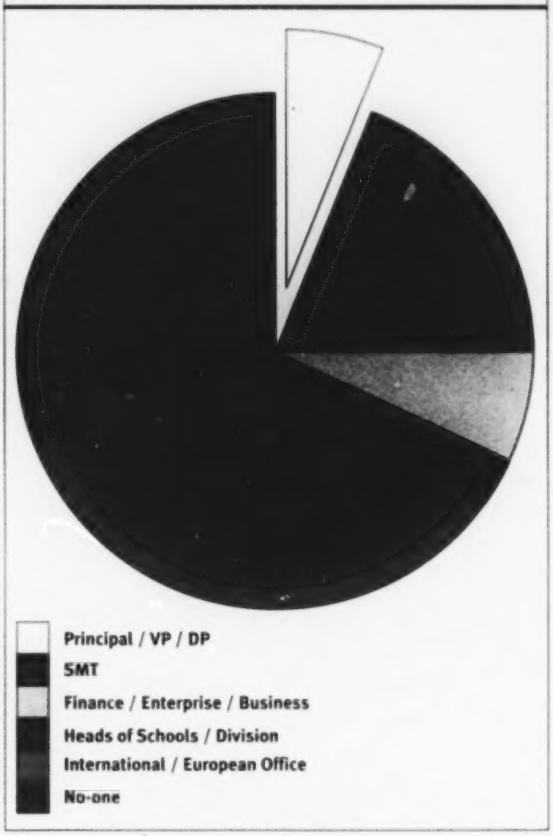
1 build a nationwide picture of the links and activities FE colleges have with overseas colleagues and institutions
2 compile a database as an information source for colleges at home and abroad
3 ascertain with what further international activities UK colleges would like support
4 write up case studies of interesting international work for publication.

Strategic approaches and management responsibility

Management responsibility

There was an excellent response by some 180 colleges to the survey, indicating the interest of the sector in international links. Colleges were asked who was responsible for all international activities and this gave a clear indication of their priority in the college's activities. In 34% of the colleges the member of staff responsible was called either International or European Officer and in 25% of cases responsibility lay with a member of the senior management team. In the latter case this was usually because of the small size of the college or the early stage of the college involvement in international activities. In 5% of colleges international activities were treated as a development project with someone designated as project leader. In 7% of colleges international activities were looked after by enterprise and business units or by finance officers and in most of these cases international work was seen more as a further source of income rather than a curriculum and staff development issue.

Figure 1: Responsibility for international activities



It was also clear from the survey that the main focus of activity was with our European partners. Over a third of colleges (34%) now have a European Officer even where someone else has overall responsibility for international work. This development has been borne out in FEDA's establishment of a Network of European Officers to which some 26% of colleges have subscribed in the first three months.

Strategic planning

The strategic importance of international work to colleges was investigated by establishing whether or not the international dimension appeared in the

college's strategic plan. Nearly three quarters (72%) of colleges make reference to international activity in their strategic plans with such statements as:

The curriculum portfolio will be developed to meet the challenge of the single market and to develop a European dimension.

To enhance the opportunity for international links for students and staff.

To develop the European and international dimension of the college curriculum offer as a means of enriching the students' learning experience and enhancing opportunities.

To provide a range of specialist courses that will recruit students on an international basis. (Agriculture College)

The college will actively foster education links overseas and will encourage all who work or study here to adopt an international outlook.

However, the intentions of the strategic plan appear generally not to have been formulated into an operational plan: only 41% of colleges have a written policy for international activities. What was encouraging was that of that 41%, 10% of the policies had been written by a European team, although in most cases they appear to have been completed by the vice-principal. Translating the good intentions of a strategic plan into realistic plans is the crucial step in recognising the need for time and resources for international work.

The colleges with any volume of international activity tend to have recognised the resourcing issue and have a dedicated international or European unit with clerical support, separate accommodation and a budget and targets. At present, this is exactly a third of the colleges surveyed. It is a big commitment and it can be some years before the investment is returned. Also there is the danger with research done by a separate unit, that the rest of the college feel it is not their concern.

BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS

Considerable responsibility rests on international/European officers to ensure the whole college is aware of the international dimension and participates where appropriate. They need to accentuate the benefits of international work and to seek ways to minimise the drawbacks. When asked what these were, the responses were as follows:

Benefits

Broadening experience for students **48%**

Many of the students in FE have had little experience of the world outside their own town, and a visit or an exchange can open their eyes to the opportunities for work outside the UK. They also benefit from being part of a group.

Staff development **37%**

Working with colleagues from other countries enables staff to look at their own experience afresh and to recognise their own good practice as well as learn from colleagues working in a different system.

Curriculum enrichment **27%**

Some of the best examples of international links have been in the development of joint curriculum projects and materials. These are essential if students are to be prepared for work in a global community.

Increasing job prospects for students **19%**

Labour force mobility in the EU is becoming a reality and we have a responsibility to ensure our students can take up such opportunities.

Attracting extra funding **19%**

There is the opportunity to bid for funds for innovative work that the college is unlikely to fund when budgets are tight. European Social Fund (ESF) funding provides an opportunity to meet the needs of the local community.

Language acquisition **17%**

The take-up of modern language provision can be disappointing; international activities provide a motivation for learning a language.

A recruitment tool 14%

The inclusion of international experience in an offer to a student can be a good marketing tool, especially so in sixth form colleges.

Raising the profile of the college 11%

Colleges with a high level of international activity have a high profile in their local press and community as it is more newsworthy than other work.

Knowledge of other countries' education systems 11%

We can learn a great deal from the different systems and cultures of other countries' vocational and adult education.

Drawbacks

Lack of time of staff 52%

Unless a college has a dedicated unit, international activity can depend on the goodwill of enthusiasts and matters such as writing a bid for funds can take up many hours of a lecturer's time. The costs need to be recognised.

Cost 37%

Well-managed international activity can cover its costs but rarely make money for a college. Most bids for money expect matched funding from the college. The best managed colleges made sure there were dedicated resources for international work.

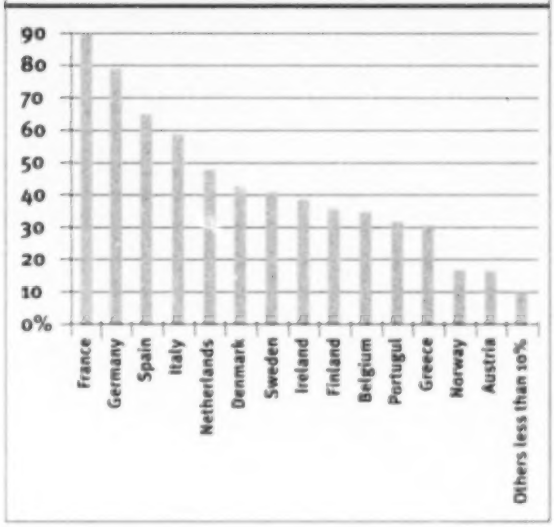
EU bureaucracy 18%

There is no doubt that the bureaucracy of the EU can be very frustrating to those who have to complete the necessary forms and keep the accounts. Again this is a factor that needs to be recognised by senior management.

Uncertain funding 16%

This can be a major problem as a college has to plan or even run its programmes before it knows whether it has won the funding it has bid for.

Figure 2: Links with other E.U. Member States



Not core business 13%

Unless the international dimension is fully integrated into a programme, students and staff will see it not as a core activity but as peripheral and will not be prepared to give it time and attention.

Maintaining links once established 10%

The research made it clear that most links depend on personal friendships and they can collapse if one of the partners leaves the job. Also political and economic circumstances can so change that it is no longer possible to sustain the link.

Lack of student interest 9%

One of the disappointing aspects of the research was the clear indication that many students are just not interested in exchanges or visits. It seems that part of this reluctance stems from an anxiety about hosting foreign students in return.

Finding the right partners 8%

An unexpected drawback proved to be that it is quite difficult to ensure that one's college is linking like with like. Vocational education is offered abroad in private colleges, schools, universities but rarely in a college equivalent to a UK FE college.

Undervaluing the experience of staff **8%**

Many individual staff had language skills or contacts and knowledge of other countries but those organising international links could be unaware of this. A staff audit of international experience would be useful.

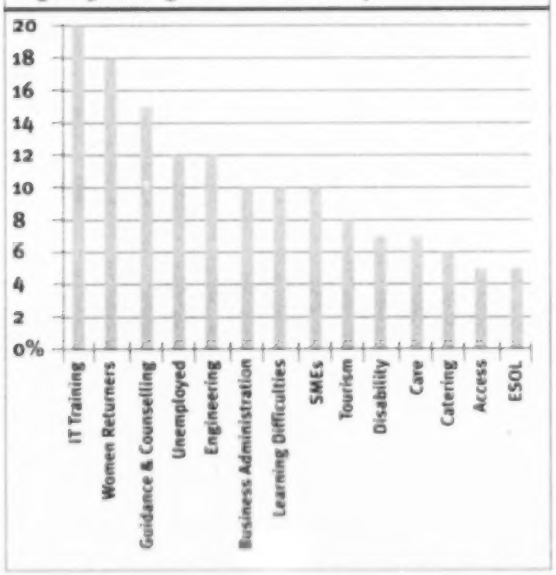
EUROPEAN ACTIVITY

European links

Colleges were asked to describe the nature of their European links. A clear correlation emerged between the countries most visited by students on visits or exchanges and the languages most widely taught in our schools and college.

Because of the problems of students' levels of competence in foreign languages, exchanges with the English-speaking Scandinavian and Dutch countries are a major part of the exchange programme. They are also often prompted by the enthusiasm of colleges in those countries to make links with the UK so that their students can practise their English. Another factor in the choice of countries is the cost of living in countries such as Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Norway for our students and conversely the problems of exchange with poorer countries such as Turkey. However, if colleges can find the funding there is clearly scope for development of exchanges with the countries in the bottom half of the table.

Figure 3: Colleges' use of the European Social Fund



Many of the initial contacts with countries involved staff on visits or exchanges but this only accounted for a third of the link visits. The only country to which there were significantly more staff visits than student visits was Norway. This may be accounted for by the high cost of living there.

Curriculum links

What was most encouraging was the number of curriculum projects with colleges in other countries. These quite naturally were more numerous with countries where English is spoken – for example, Ireland with 20% of activities being curriculum projects. Some of these projects involved the use of e-mail and the Internet but when asked whether they had used e-mail and the Internet for curriculum purposes in their international links only a third of the colleges had done so. Use clearly needs to be extended beyond the enthusiastic few with guidance on how to use them in a curriculum context.

The number of programmes offered in other European countries by franchising was insignificant as were consultancies, except in links with Ireland where 10% of the activities were consultancies.

Using EU funding

Seventy per cent of colleges had been successful in attracting European funding for their international links. Most of the projects came under Lingua and Petra and latterly Leonardo and Socrates; they had only moderate success with funds such as Youthstart, Horizon, Now and Adapt. The message seems to be that everyone is applying for the more academic and curriculum focused funds and there is less competition for the funds more closely associated with unemployment and retraining. However, 30% are still not accessing any of the EU funds.

It was encouraging to see that the European Social Funding was used for international activities and not just for support of training at home. Around 76% of colleges had accessed ESF at some time although the money had been used largely to supplement Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funding rather than to Europeanise the curriculum. Twenty per cent (20%) of ESF bids have been used for information technology (IT) training, 18% for courses for women returners and 13% for guidance and counselling.

Other programmes have focused on the unemployed, small businesses, students with learning difficulties, engineering, tourism, English as a second language and catering. A random selection of students (32%)

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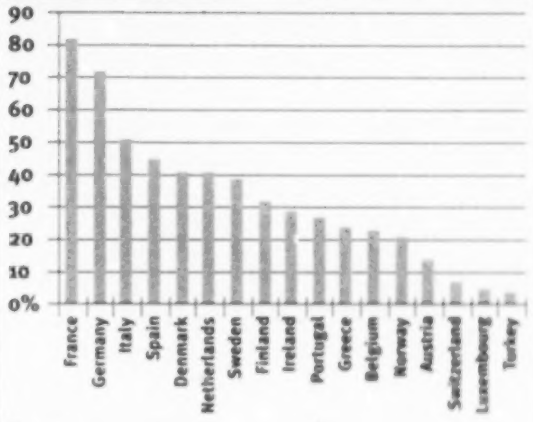
on ESF-funded programmes, when asked, were unaware of this . Best practice in colleges made sure that programmes were clearly badged as ESF funded.

Business Studies is the area with the most European links probably partly as a result of the greater numbers of Business Studies students in colleges.

Figure 4: Colleges hosting staff visits from other Western European countries



Note:
i) These figures do not include multiple visits to a college from the same country.
ii) These figures do not distinguish between visits by individuals or by groups

Language students, not surprisingly, are also involved in European links. What is significant is that Engineering, provision of which has shrunk so much in recent years in UK colleges, is the second most involved area in European links. This may well be a result of the continued prominence of engineering as a profession in mainland Europe reflected in their greater student numbers. Leisure and Tourism and Hospitality and Catering, predictably, are the other curriculum areas with several European links. It is clear from these figures that there is considerable scope for the development of European links with many curriculum areas. All the evidence shows, however, that an essential ingredient for this development is an enthusiastic member of staff within the curriculum area with whom the European Officer can work.

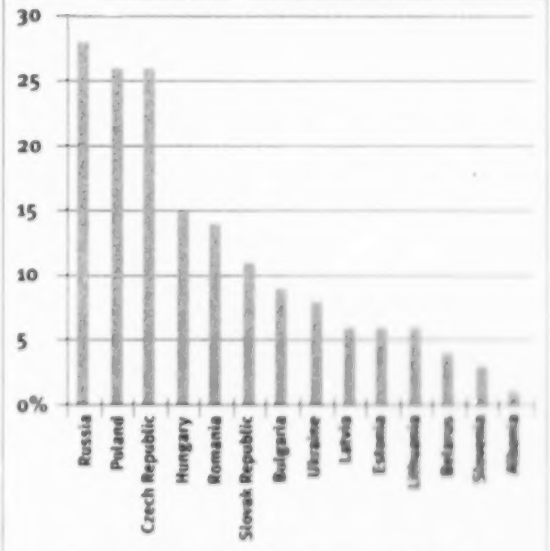
Visits from abroad

The research made it abundantly clear that there was an unsatisfied demand from other Western European countries for staff and student visits to our colleges. It identified 891 separate visits by staff with the greatest number coming from France, Germany, Italy, Denmark and the Netherlands. This figure does not include multiple visits to a college from the same country. Much of this interest is centred round the NVQ framework of competence-based qualifications and the development of learning resource centres in a more student-centred environment. This contrasts with 708 visits from our staff to other EU countries; the disparity being accounted for by language problems and lack of time and money. It has also been suggested that this indicates the relative value we put on international work in the UK compared with our continental colleagues.

The number of student visits from the EU mirrors the number of staff visits from each country except for Spain, Portugal and Belgium where students have participated proportionately in more visits. Belgium can be explained by its geographical proximity and Spain and Portugal by the EU's encouragement to northern countries to make links with the less prosperous Mediterranean countries. As a further confirmation of this, 59 colleges in the survey sent students from the UK to Spain on visits and exchanges compared with 22 to Denmark and 20 to Ireland.

Colleges were also asked if they had hosted visits from college governors or board members, with interesting results. Governors in this country are very interested in international comparisons, as borne out by those taking part in FEDA's international study visits but the combined total of governor visits from all other EU countries was only 40. This contrast could also be a result of the increased involvement, since incorporation, of governors in this country in the work of the colleges.

Figure 5: Links with Eastern European countries

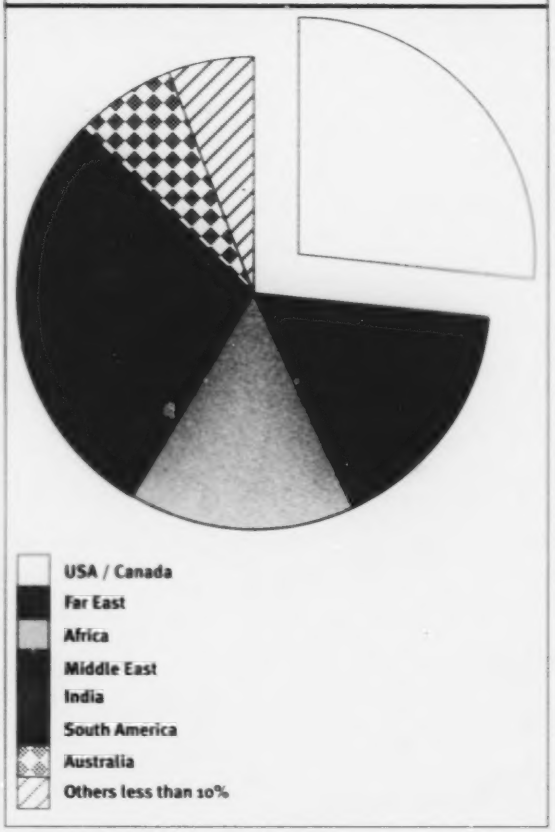


Former Yugoslavia not included because of changing nature of boundaries

Eastern Europe

Colleges have had very different experiences of making links with Eastern Europe. There have been some successful links with Russia, Poland and the Czech Republic, mainly in consultancy and offering programmes but apart from this, colleges have very limited involvement in countries in the former eastern bloc. Only 17% of our colleges have managed to secure funding for Eastern Europe activities. The instability and economic straits of most of the former Soviet Union are not really creating the right climate for fostering links. Of all the countries Poland appears to be the most promising for links on curriculum projects; 16 colleges are already involved in such projects. There is considerable interest in Eastern Europe in management training for their vocational college managers and also in our competence-based qualifications. It is too early in many of these countries for student visits and exchanges, although the survey identified 24 colleges involved in links with Russia, 23 with Poland and 40 with the Czech Republic.

Figure 6: Links outside Europe



Beyond Europe

USA and Canada

Outside Europe it is not surprising that colleges' international links are mainly with the United States and Canada. Over half (52%) of colleges had been involved in staff visits and exchanges, many of which had arisen out of visits to the Annual Convention of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), to which FEDA has taken groups for ten years. What is rather disappointing, however, is that in our survey there had only been some 18 curriculum projects which compares poorly with Italy (43 projects) or Greece (26), despite language difficulties not associated with the States.

There were only nine Internet links with the States compared with, for example, 13 with Germany. There is quite clearly considerable potential for Internet work on curriculum projects with colleges in the States. Student visits and exchanges are more problematic with the cost and distance of travel.

Africa

More than a quarter (27%) of colleges have links with Africa and particularly with South Africa. The interest in South Africa in the UK is considerable as illustrated by the fact that over 80 colleges have joined FEDA visits to the country in the past three years. The UK government was slower than Australia, New Zealand or Canada in offering support after the elections in South Africa but there are now a number of consultancies and curriculum projects in which UK colleges are involved supporting individual colleges in South Africa as they move towards a competence-based curriculum framework. The lesson to be learned from those involved is the need for patience as links take a long time to develop and the importance of not making culturally biased judgements about the management of their colleges.

The Far East, Pacific Rim and Australasia

The importance of the Pacific Rim in the global economy is connected to the growth in UK colleges' links with this part of the world. Nearly one quarter (23%) of colleges now have links here; staff from 56 colleges have visited countries such as Hong Kong and Malaysia. There is also increased activity in the offering of college courses in the Far East, particularly at HND/HNC level, with 29 colleges in the survey doing so. The survey also identified 18

examples of programmes franchised to providers in the Far East. However, in total only 11% of colleges franchised any programmes abroad at all.

Mainly because of distance, only 12% of UK colleges had links with Australasia. With a common language Australia should offer possibilities for curriculum and Internet links.

There has been a long tradition of recruiting students from Hong Kong to programmes in UK colleges and it will be interesting to observe the effect on recruitment of Hong Kong's return to Chinese rule. Some colleges, particularly in Scotland, recruit from mainland China and this could be an enormous market in the future.

Middle East

A quarter of colleges have links with countries in the Middle East, particularly those which were former British colonies. More UK qualifications and programmes are offered here than elsewhere in the world. Staff from 17% of UK colleges have visited the area as lecturers or consultants. The problems of working in these countries have been identified as consistency of standards and quality assurance and coping with cultural differences.

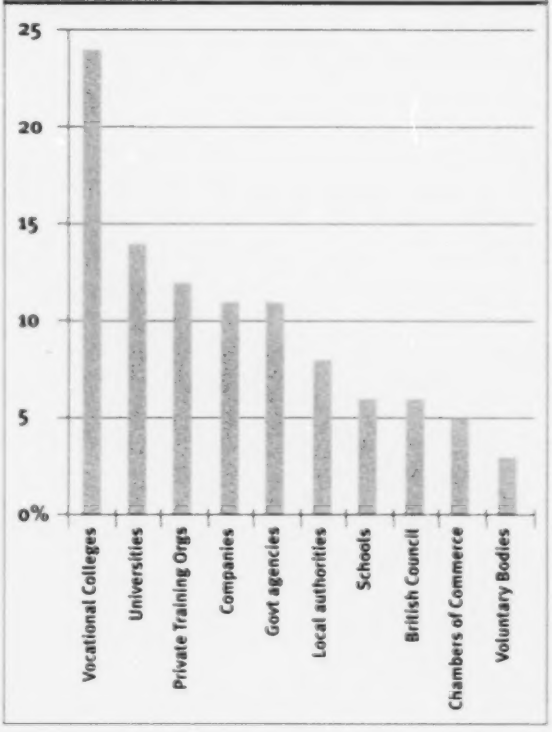
Indian sub-continent

The Indian sub-continent attracts little interest from UK colleges; only 14% have any form of link. The greatest activity is in staff visits but little other form of link results from this. The Indians set great store by education, particularly IT, as witnessed by the increasing amount of global IT work being sited in the sub-continent. There ought to be scope for Internet links, particularly for UK students who can speak the languages of India and Pakistan.

Latin America

There are very few links with Latin America, with only 12% of colleges involved in any kind of activity. This is an area of the world where competence in another language, Spanish or Portuguese, really is essential but where qualifications are only just beginning to be developed so there is considerable scope for staff exchanges and consultancies. The World Bank has identified Latin America, particularly Mexico, as an area for investment in education, so colleges could find some useful links here.

Figure 7. Overseas organisations with which colleges work



Working abroad

Colleges were asked how many of their staff had been abroad on behalf of the college in the last five years. As expected the numbers ranged from one college where no one had been abroad to eight where over 100 had. Thirty-one percent of colleges had been represented by 10 to 15 staff. What was significant was that in half the colleges 13 or fewer staff had been abroad for the college. In our contacts with colleges in the rest of Europe the figure is considerably higher. If a college is to be truly internationalised, many more staff must be involved in international links.

Arranging work experience for students abroad is not easy so it was heartening to see that 58% of colleges had been able to make the arrangements. As one would expect it was the students with the most transferable skills that were found placements, with over half those working abroad coming from the areas of Business Studies, Leisure and Tourism and Hospitality and Catering. The curriculum areas where few students had work experience abroad were Science, Construction, Hairdressing and Beauty and A-levels. Two colleges had managed to place students with mild learning difficulties abroad but only one had placed students from Media and Performing Arts.

One of the difficulties for UK FE colleges is finding the appropriate colleges, schools or organisations with which to link, as few countries have the same FE structure as ourselves and the levels of programmes are delivered by different institutions. From the list below, it can be seen that there are many players in international vocational education and training and colleges cannot restrict themselves to links with other vocational colleges.

Colleges were asked to identify where international links had enabled the development of an international dimension to the curriculum and these were a few of the examples given:

- progression to an American degree
- transnational projects for 'Living and Working in Europe'
- GNVQ Advanced in Engineering – linked with BMW in UK and Germany
- joint certification for polymers with France
- use of Dutch partners' superior facilities in Eindhoven for robotics
- joint recognition of European qualifications in construction
- visits to Spain and Italy for learners with learning disabilities
- a European Youth conference bi-annually for all 15 EU countries
- European merchandising
- development of joint module with Health and Care college in Sweden
- Japanese studies in general studies programme.

Good practice in international work is encapsulated in many of these projects. Essential elements seem to be: equal partnerships where the particular strengths of each organisation are used for the benefit of the project; the involvement of employers wherever possible; integration into the core curriculum of a programme; a tangible product; meaningful use of IT; the development of the language skills of both staff and students; and the continuation of the partnership after the completion of the project.

LINKS FOR THE FUTURE

Colleges identified the countries with which they would like to develop links in the future. The most popular, in order, were:

Eastern Europe (as a group)

With certain former eastern bloc countries being accepted into the enlarged EU, it is an ideal time to develop partnerships although colleges report problems in working in many of these countries. The three most favoured are Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. FEDA will be organising a visit to these countries.

USA

Although over half of the colleges have participated in staff visits to the States, in most cases no real lasting links have resulted and there is a desire to look for more active relationships, possibly using IT. Yearly visits to the AACC and the Association of Community College Teachers (ACCT) conventions create the opportunities to make these links.

Spain

There have been considerable changes in the Ministry of Education in Spain over the last year resulting in the cancellation of several projects because of funding uncertainties. Colleges are keen to re-establish links.

Latin America (as a group)

This is an area where few colleges have ventured so far, except for work in Mexico. However, the World Bank is supporting the development of vocational education in most Latin American countries and if colleges have staff who can speak Spanish or Portuguese, there are opportunities which FEDA is anxious to support.

Eire

A visit by a FEDA delegation to Eire this year identified the opportunities for links for all levels of projects.

Canada

From a practical point of view the province of Canada where links are most likely to grow is Ontario, which is English speaking and accessible by reasonably priced flights.

South Africa

More than 80 colleges have visited South Africa over the past three years with FEDA and while some have established partnerships, many have not. It is important to stress that South African colleges are going through such a rapid period of transition that the best advice at present is to keep in touch until the colleges have set up their qualifications framework (after some long delays) and can see the benefits of a partnership with UK colleges.

Portugal

Some colleges have active and productive partnerships in Portugal but there is still scope for others to make links.

Conclusions from the survey

- Links with the USA and Canada could be far more productive.
- FEDA should help colleges identify organisations outside vocational colleges with which to link.
- There is a need for the development of work experience abroad in some curriculum areas.
- Colleges should involve more staff in international links.
- More appropriate language training needs to be recognised for funding.
- There is great potential in electronic links, particularly with Australasia and the Indian sub-continent.
- The potential of Latin America needs exploring.
- The sector needs to make a more concerted effort in Eastern Europe.
- There is tremendous potential for selling UK qualifications abroad.

3. Learning from experience and good practice

In late 1996 and early 1997 11 colleges were invited to contribute to a FEDA survey of **International Links in FE** by participating in an interview to amplify what they had already presented in a questionnaire. The outcomes of these interviews are considered under the following headings:

- college's rationale for international links
- different models of international partnership
- management structures
- using IT
- lessons learned
- best practice.

The colleges were:

Blackburn College
Carlisle College
City College, Manchester
Filton College, Bristol
Motherwell College
North London Colleges' European Network
Park Lane College, Leeds
Plymouth College
Ridge Danyers College
Scarborough Sixth Form College
Warwickshire College

Strategic issues

The rationale for colleges' involvement in international links was quite diverse and in the case of some institutions, especially the larger ones, mixed. There was some geographical spread in the choice of colleges but little to support the theory that the closer the colleges were to mainland Europe, the greater their level of activity. There was, however, evidence that Scottish colleges had longer and more varied links with other countries.

Commercial

With the tighter limits to traditional sources of funding from FEFC and elsewhere, colleges are beginning to make serious efforts to generate additional business through diversifying into international markets. Colleges are able to increase their income through the recruitment of overseas students and through the export of aspects of the curriculum, such as the GNVQ/NVQ model, which are particularly attractive to overseas clients. The more interesting curriculum projects were not a source of much extra funding as there was always an element of matched funding.

Added value

Alongside the more commercial considerations, colleges are also aware of the added value which could accrue from international links. Through the careful construction of international partnerships colleges are able to create staff development and student learning experiences which complement and enhance existing services, as well as giving colleges a competitive edge in the local market. Sixth form colleges were particularly aware of this added value element which could be highlighted when recruiting new students. Shared curriculum projects in almost every case enhanced curriculum development in the college.

Supporting local economic development

International links can help support an increasingly global local economy with training and educational solutions which serve the needs of companies from the Far East and elsewhere. This is an aspect that would seem to have a real future as more companies relocate to the United Kingdom. Activities involving a local multi-national company provide a global perspective to a student's learning experience on the college's doorstep.

Supporting innovation

There is also evidence that international links are being used as a means of developing new products. The opportunities offered by international partnerships to share and refine experience and re-evaluate established models are becoming a mechanism for innovation in the sector. In other words, with the help of European funding, colleges were able to develop initiatives which could not be supported by

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core funding and presented the possibility of sharing expensive equipment with partners from other countries.

Improving the profile of vocational education and training

Despite much rhetoric about the need for improved education and training as a means of increasing economic performance, some FE colleges felt that the sector still suffered from having a low profile relative to others – for example, higher education (HE) and the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). In some colleges, therefore, the creation of international links is being seen as a significant dimension in the improvement of the profile of vocational education and training. This has been helped by the higher status of vocational education in countries such as Germany and the recognition that the teaching and learning that take place in UK colleges can often be equated with work done in universities in some other countries.

This diversity of rationale for international links has resulted in colleges developing a range of different models of international partnerships as detailed in the following section. There is no one model that is more appropriate than another but a college still needs to take a strategic approach in deciding what its rationale for international links will be.

Different models of international partnership

Exporting the curriculum

Developments in vocational education and training in this country over the last 10 to 15 years, particularly the establishment of competence-based models of training and assessment, have attracted interest in other parts of the world alongside the longer-established interest in more traditional models. Some colleges have preferred to concentrate on researching and developing these export markets.

Motherwell College, for example, has taken advantage of Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) grants to promote the college in the Far East and South America, as well as joining trade delegations to put education and training on a trade agenda. Motherwell's approach has arisen from less positive experiences of overseas students coming to the UK and the belief that training and education models can be more effectively customised and embedded if they are delivered *in situ*.

The British Council identified Warwickshire College in the early 1980s as having an expertise in water technology which found a ready market in African countries and with this experience the college has explored the markets in the Middle East. This has been done in a consortium with Coventry and Wolverhampton Universities, Solihull and Henley Colleges and it certainly proved much easier to sell their college's programmes as part of a consortium. However, the advice is to research the market thoroughly before making any commitments and seek the help of bodies such as the British Council. This of course implies an investment of funds for this investigation. Warwickshire now offers programmes in Kuwait in Accounts, Landscaping, Hospitality, Building Maintenance and Engineering

This curriculum export model involves UK colleges in promoting UK education and training to appropriate government departments and securing contracts to provide training to support delivery in local centres in line with curriculum frameworks. It uses learning materials supplied from and developed in the UK as well as systems for assessment and internal and external verification. This model allows for curriculum and materials to be customised to take account of local circumstances, where appropriate. Interestingly, Motherwell College reported that the SQA (Scotvec) competence-based model is particularly appropriate for many countries.

Recruiting overseas students

While Motherwell College has largely distanced itself from a policy of recruiting overseas students, others, especially Filton College, City College, Manchester and Park Lane College in Leeds and, to a lesser extent, Carlisle College are all committed to recruiting overseas students. Manchester, Filton and Park Lane have international prospectuses and staff dedicated to marketing FE opportunities especially in the Middle and Far East. These colleges have gradually developed internal support systems for these students including accommodation, pastoral services and English as a Foreign Language. As Filton College has discovered, there must be a flexible approach to what is on offer to the students and then there can be a real expansion in numbers. In the current year they have 170 overseas students.

Colleges have been able to exploit their own contexts as a means of attracting foreign students. For example, City College, Manchester has encouraged foreign students to participate in its music technology course provision which supports Manchester as one of the world's leaders in the music business.

Carlisle, on the other hand, seeks to attract foreign students because it is a relatively small city with extensive surrounding countryside which appeals to potential students for whom student life in the larger conurbations may appear daunting. Blackburn College has largely attracted foreign students to areas where it has particular curriculum strengths, for example, telecommunications and electronics.

Vocational language training

FE colleges are uniquely positioned to provide a service which is outside the scope of most of the dedicated providers of English as a Foreign Language training. Increasingly, providers of vocational education and training throughout the world are concerned to integrate the learning of key skills, including foreign languages, into the teaching of vocational subjects. This approach recognises both the key role played by English as an international language in the global economy and the increased motivation of students where the rationale for language learning is explicitly linked to career aspirations. The teaching of English for special purposes has a tremendous potential for growth.

Filton College has developed its provision in vocational language training by using its expertise in teaching business English. This can often mean teaching senior business people so attention must be paid to the learning environment and pace of tuition. Blackburn College has designed and delivered projects to support this integration. The College ran a course for trainee purchasers from a petrochemical company in Qatar, involving integrated English language and training in purchasing. In other initiatives vocational students from Denmark, the Netherlands and France participated in work placements in the UK with relevant language support. With the wider availability of the new communication technologies to extend links between different locations the potential for use of this approach becomes very much greater.

English as a foreign language

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has traditionally been delivered in most parts of the country through dedicated language schools and HE establishments. It was interesting that two of the 11 colleges in this study were making plans to develop this provision for the first time. Both Carlisle College and Scarborough Sixth Form College plan to exploit the benefits accruing from their locations to attract EFL learners. Carlisle College has prepared a flexible programme with social activities in the Lake District and Scarborough Sixth Form College is similarly in a position to exploit the infrastructure developed for the tourist trade. In both cases summer EFL courses mean that use of college buildings, staff and other facilities can be maximised over the summer. Filton College in Bristol, on the other hand, has established its reputation over many years. They point out that this provision must be well planned and flexible before the college considers enrolling overseas students on mainstream programmes.

One of the comments made by all those interviewed and many of those completing the questionnaire was that the present funding model does not allow for the appropriate type of intensive language training needed for a particular visit abroad. Staff and students are not seeking a qualification which the present funding regime insists on but merely enough vocabulary to communicate in a hotel or on a building site in another country. Language preparation can be included in bids for Euro money but there is always some element of matched funding.

Curriculum niche markets

Manchester's pre-eminence as a provider of training support for the music technology industry has already been noted. Blackburn exploits its use of new technology for flexible and open learning; the college has hosted study tours from a wide range of international partners to examine the potential of the new technologies to support the learning process. Warwickshire College's expertise in water technology provided an opening for more general provision by establishing a strong reputation overseas.

The types of partnerships described in the five sections above fall into the commercial category. However, all the colleges in the study were also very keen to exploit international links because of the added value they brought to students and staff through the following types of partnerships.

Partnerships for curriculum enhancement

Partnerships designed to carry the international or European dimension into the curriculum take a variety of forms and have been targeted at a wide range of learners in different sectors. The examples which follow illustrate this diversity of target groups.

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Foreign Languages, Catering and Tourism

For obvious reasons, Foreign Languages, Catering and Tourism have traditionally been very popular sectors for international links in the form of work placements and exchanges. Colleges which had had some difficulty in encouraging student mobility such as Carlisle and, to a certain extent, Blackburn have had successful international links in these sectors. Plymouth College has for some years been running a successful link with a lycée in the Jura where their hospitality and catering students spend their second year both in the college improving their French and in a work placement in hotels and restaurants.

In every case the colleges identified the problem of improving our students' level of foreign language skills to be able to cope with work abroad. Funding for appropriate classes was a real problem because the type of language support the students needed did not match the recognised units for FEFC funding. The strong message was that if the FEFC wanted our students to compete in a global economy there was a need to see appropriate language provision as core and not peripheral to funding.

There is also the issue of developing language skills amongst staff to support international work. City College, Manchester has addressed this by taking some 50 staff over the past three years through a Spanish and Portuguese programme supported by Lingua Action B funds.

Vocational education

Scarborough Sixth Form College delivers one module of the Health and Social Care GNVQ in Italy. Through study visits, students are required to research social services provision in Ferrara and use this as a means of critically evaluating their own local social services provision. Most of the colleges interviewed found it difficult to enthuse staff and students in many curriculum areas; an understandable concern was that time spent abroad might dilute the core programme. It was, therefore, seen as very important to ensure that any work done abroad fitted the accreditation demands of the qualification the students were following.

Joint student projects in a common subject area

Drama students at City College, Manchester had written and performed a play in partnership with students in Portugal focusing on shared historical events; the plays were performed in both locations in each language. Likewise Ridge Danyers' performing arts students had a link with Stockport's twin town lycée in Bezier and performed plays in each other's towns. Blackburn brought students from Poland and Blackburn together to explore common concerns around social issues such as the role of the media, sport and the use of drugs.

North London College's European Network provides an excellent example of partnerships for curriculum projects not only between different countries but between local partners. The development of international work is often difficult for a college on its own but by pooling resources it is possible to find the time and energy to bid for external funds and work on innovative projects. The network is made up of Barnet, Enfield, Hendon, Southgate, North East London, Capel Manor, Woodhouse colleges, the local TEC and Middlesex University. From the early days of Petra funding this group has co-operated with colleges in the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, and Finland to embed a European dimension in the curriculum. They have designed assignments that students in all the countries can complete as part of their programme of study. Areas covered have been the Built Environment, Business Studies, Health and Care, Informatics, and Leisure and Tourism. UK partnerships for these endeavours can lead to far more productive work in internationalising the curriculum.

Marginalised groups

Colleges which had enabled marginalised groups to participate in international links reported that the benefits for such groups were particularly significant. From City College, Manchester a group of special needs students went on work placements in botanical gardens in Spain preceded by language training. Park Lane described similar initiatives including mature students from minority ethnic groups, and reports that their participation in overseas work experience enhanced their prospects of university entrance. North London Colleges' European Network is involved with colleagues from four countries studying student drop-out with the aim of developing some teacher training modules to help those who have to deal with disenchanted youth.

Partnerships for social mobility

The two sixth-form colleges in our study, Ridge Danyers and Scarborough, laid particular stress on the social mobility benefits to students of international links. Many of this generation of students will

find work or be sent to work in companies overseas and visits, exchanges and placements are excellent preparation for such a working life.

Scarborough Sixth Form College valued their international links as an opportunity for students who had had limited experience of overseas travel to gain from the social dimensions of international links, and had encouraged students and their parents to view them from this perspective too. Ridge Danyers College' management has been generous in supporting such activity as a core part of the college's offer to their students. City College, Manchester has incorporated the extension of such opportunities into its strategic planning with external funds being matched from the college budget. In 1996/7 19 European curriculum and training projects were organised for its staff and students funded by the Socrates and Leonardo programmes. The College is by far the largest provider of Lingua Action E joint education projects with European partners in the FE sector.

One of the major problems most colleges encountered was the reluctance of students to take part in exchanges and visits abroad. It seems horizons are somewhat limited especially for those living in inner cities. Carlisle College, despite some success with catering and tourism students, has had less success in encouraging students from other sectors to participate. Blackburn College also reported reluctance on the part of some students to take part.

Teachers and administrative staff

Teacher placements, exchanges and study visits were all seen as a valuable form of staff development. One teacher from Scarborough Sixth Form College who had been on an exchange in Sweden pointed out that the flight cost the same as the average conference. There were also examples of administrative staff involvement in international links.

The success of the North London Network illustrates the need for an initial investment of staff time to investigate the partnership possibilities. Because colleges got together they were able to afford to send the co-ordinator to continental Europe for two months to make the links. In the long term this initial investment can reap rewards by winning additional funds for the college because of personal contacts in other countries. Warwickshire College has been able to assess the markets abroad by giving the co-ordinator time to travel and, for example, to identify some of the difficulties in setting up work in the former Eastern bloc. Expensive mistakes can thus be avoided.

Services for local business

Park Lane College has established a Business Club to enable local businesses to access services enhancing their capacity to exploit international markets. Similarly, Motherwell College is positioning itself to provide linguistic and childcare services to the growing number of companies from the Far East. Plymouth College has run a European Business Centre in the town which receives all the information from the European Commission. There would seem to be further scope for this kind of activity.

Curriculum innovation projects

The experience of international partnerships, especially partnerships with countries and cultures with very different systems and solutions to education and training, can provide a very creative environment in which to develop new models of training. Blackburn College's partnership with Polish schools is exploring new ways of motivating learners through involving them in collecting information about the local labour market and creating local occupational maps with support from teams of teachers and industry representatives. At Park Lane, the development of a shared model of assessment by partners in Europe brought together best practice from a number of countries to create a new model. Working in the Middle East Warwickshire College has learned many lessons about dealing with a different culture and how to provide a bridge for Arab students between their education and HE in this country.

City College, Manchester is engaged in an interesting project with a vocational school in Finland. The Manchester tutor teaches macrobiology to a group of Finnish students by videoconference which is then backed up by practical laboratory activities supervised by Finnish teachers in Finland.

Projects such as these operate in the 'teacher as researcher' tradition. With the decrease in opportunities for such activity due to funding and contractual constraints in colleges, these international partnerships become more significant and more valued. The potential to develop this kind of project, especially using new communication technologies, is considerable at the present time.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

In most of the colleges in the survey the management of international links has followed a similar pattern of evolution. Initial international links had tended to be carried out by committed or interested individual

members of staff either because of a curriculum or personal interest. However, when activity reached a certain level it was necessary to formalise arrangements through the establishment of appropriate structures. A number of important issues determined the form which these more formal structures have taken.

The need to provide a stimulus and focus for growth

Scarborough Sixth Form College has developed its international links in the informal way described above; however, when the volume of activity increased to a certain level it became the responsibility of one member of staff to stimulate and support international links across the organisation.

In the larger colleges this one person has grown into a larger unit with dedicated administrative and clerical support. These units usually support and sometimes stimulate activities which are delivered through departments and faculties. They also provide financial, travel and management services. Both Plymouth and Filton college stressed the importance of trying to involve staff from different curriculum areas so that they owned international work and it was properly linked to the curriculum. Staff needed support in writing bids but it was important that the international office did not do the work for them.

The need for quality control

In Scarborough and elsewhere an increase in volume exposed variations in quality and this in turn led to the development of good practice guidelines. The system for supporting exchanges, as in Scarborough, and the stages required to establish an effective partnership, as in Blackburn, are good examples of this.

In most colleges there was a feeling that quality assurance could be improved. Plymouth College has an ESF audit policy in which they set standards so that the college is better prepared for an external audit. At Ridge Danyers the co-ordinator wrote an annual review of international activities for the director of curriculum and at Filton College all staff were asked, as part of an internal quality audit, to grade the international provision and a report was submitted to the Board.

The need for a 'one-stop' shop

In Manchester and elsewhere, difficulties arose when different parts of the College were involved in the recruitment and support of overseas students. In most cases this has led to a recognition of the need to concentrate responsibility in a dedicated unit or small team with specific responsibilities. Filton College has recognised the need for co-ordinated support of overseas students both for their study and their leisure and has appointed an international students co-ordinator and set up an international students centre. Warwickshire College has also appointed an international student support manager to ensure, for example, that students are met at the airport when they arrive in this country.

Integration with college structures

In most colleges, international links are formally recognised through the College's mission statement and other statements of policy commitment. Implementation arrangements are similarly documented and often involve the staff with specific responsibility for reporting either directly to the principalship or through a body with responsibility for external relations. Arrangements such as those at Motherwell, where international interests are administered by the college company using links with other local agencies, are particularly effective.

The North London Network has a steering group made up of the principals and chief executives of each constituent body to whom the co-ordinator is responsible. Each college also has its own European officer who works closely with the Network's co-ordinator.

However, Carlisle, Ridge Danyers and Blackburn Colleges reported that at senior management level there remained considerable uncertainty, given other pressures, as to the amount of time and resources the college should focus on international links. All colleges interviewed felt it was essential to have the support of an international enthusiast on the senior management team.

Internal communication systems

In most colleges in the survey, one or more members of staff had been given responsibility for international links and increasingly these members of staff operated through a specialised unit or dedicated teams. Where arrangements had been more formalised, and especially in the larger colleges, there was a system of departmental or faculty representa-

tives who were the first point of contact for the international or European officer. Colleges also produced regular newsletters and held seminars for interested staff as a mechanism for both dissemination and staff development. The North London Network produces an excellent regular newsletter that all staff in all the colleges receive. Warwickshire College has an international committee with two members from each directorate. The international work at Filton has a very high profile with colourful and interesting newsletters.

It is interesting that at Scarborough Sixth Form College, which is a relatively small College with one large staff room where everyone meets on a daily basis, it has not yet been considered necessary to establish more formal structures. However for their European exchanges detailed written guidelines, responsibilities and budgeting schedules are produced and regular announcements are made via the weekly college bulletin. It is perhaps significant that within this culture 45% of staff have participated in exchanges in the last three years.

The need for co-operation

The competitive relationships between colleges have meant that up to now international links have largely been focused on one institution or one FE institution with clearly identified progression routes to a local HE institution. However, some of the colleges in the survey are convinced of the benefits of greater co-operation with other local colleges to the extent, in Blackburn and Park Lane, of preparing bids as consortia in Blackburn's case this is done through independent consultants as neutral facilitators. This may be a growing trend towards a more regional approach with units or special teams servicing a group of colleges and other agencies. For example, Filton is part of a local Bristol network with HE institutions, schools and another FE college.

The North London Network is a model of effective co-operation, including not only colleges but the TEC and the local HE institution. It was felt that nine members comprised a manageable size that could actually achieve something but that anything bigger would become little more than a talking shop or information unit.

Staffing international links

Although international link activity was often initially developed as indicated earlier by committed individuals, with the growth in activity it is becoming clear that certain skills and attributes are important for this type of work.

Staff must be able to transfer their subject expertise to different linguistic and cultural contexts as well as to adjust their professionalism to circumstances in which different professional values and behaviours may be the norm. An added dimension is that international links are frequently funded through external grants which require different monitoring and quality control systems to the FEFC which therefore create additional need for adjustments by staff. There has therefore been considerable staff development in this area; Park Lane, in particular, has designed special programmes to make staff both in the College and local schools aware of these issues.

Colleges also recognise that not all staff are equally suited to this type of work and attempts have been made to introduce selection criteria which reflect this. In Carlisle, the principalship has selected a small team of staff with the necessary expertise and elsewhere departmental and faculty heads make the necessary selections. In Plymouth there has been recognition of the support needed for those involved in bidding for funds and the European officer has developed a useful costings model with standard spreadsheets, thus reducing the workload involved. He also summarises any guidelines for bidding to assist otherwise busy staff.

Another solution to staffing international work has been the employing of consultants where college staff are unavailable or unable to undertake work because of timetable constraints or lack of expertise. Blackburn has sought as much as possible to use college staff, but where this is not possible it has an external projects team which can either deliver in their place or bring in consultants. Motherwell uses consultants recruited through its company. Colleges also employ local agents for marketing especially in the Far East; both Blackburn and Carlisle have done this and Carlisle has put together an attractive agent's pack. City College, Manchester has an international agents' agreement which incorporates a code of conduct for its representatives abroad to ensure good practice in the recruitment of overseas students.

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The individuals who have been appointed to the roles of international or European officer have to be in a sufficiently senior position to deal directly with senior managers and have easy access to principals and other local players. They also have to be sufficiently free of regular college teaching and administrative commitments to be able to spend periods of time outside the country and operate extremely flexibly in response to local circumstance. At the same time they must be able to encourage, stimulate and manage participation by staff and students within their college. Understandably some of these individuals are feeling the strain!

Funding

Some colleges especially Carlisle, Ridge Danyers and Scarborough Sixth Form College had funded international links internally and all colleges felt that it was extremely difficult to develop international links without some funding from their institution, both to establish the necessary infrastructure and to fund officer posts as well as to fund the lead time required to develop links that could later become more self-funding. Where colleges, as at Blackburn, required their international work to be fully self-funding and if possible income-generating, there was some doubt as to whether it could be done at all in an environment where most grants only partially contributed to the cost of the work. Almost all funding regimes require input of some kind from the organisation or organisations accessing a grant. Plymouth analyses the effects of procuring outside funding on the college's overall budget to evaluate the impact of external funding on FEFC income. City College, Manchester makes an annual budgetary commitment to European curriculum work which enables it actively to seek project funding resulting in a significant European curriculum enhancement across all areas of provision

The colleges in the survey had had quite different experiences of accessing external funding for international links. Scarborough had largely confined itself to funds from the Leonardo scheme, whereas other colleges were making use of a wider range of sources of funding including the EU employment initiatives and other ESF programmes as well as DTI grants to pursue opportunities further afield. While colleges in inner-city areas appear to have been relatively successful in accessing EU funds, Carlisle had had very limited success and felt that their location meant that they were less of a priority.

Preparing bids and establishing partnerships also meant that the colleges had to commit resources, since the time and expertise required were unlikely to be found amongst the lecturing staff of most colleges. This expertise, which includes interpreting funding guidelines, preparing detailed bids, making a case through researching local needs, liaising with transnational partners and managing and monitoring projects, is increasingly concentrated within the specialist units described above, which makes sense in that it leaves departmental staff to concentrate on project delivery.

Using IT for international links

It was interesting that only four out of the 11 colleges made reference to the use of new communications technologies as a means of establishing and supporting international links. For instance Plymouth use e-mail extensively for communications although this is a recent development.

Park Lane College described its flexible and very cost-effective programme of telematics training with tutor support which is accessible from all parts of the world and effectively means that the College is open 24 hours a day throughout the year.

Blackburn College has undertaken some limited development work using cable and satellite television in combination with international partners and recently worked with Hungarian partners to explore how the Internet and other communications tools could be used to support links.

Ridge Danyers College made extensive use of the Internet, recognising that it is not necessary for students to travel for them to have international experience. They have been involved with 11 partners from different countries in a European studies exchange via the Internet.

The North London Network has been involved in an Informatics programme with partners all over Europe and a website is being set up by the Finnish partner for the partnership.

City College, Manchester has produced a CD-Rom which complements its homepage on the Internet and these can be used in British Council and agents' offices throughout the world.

However, relatively slow progress is being made to exploit videoconferencing, e-mail and other communications tools fully. There is therefore high potential for joint student projects, staff development initiatives and development projects to

explore the implications of these technologies in terms of how they will support and influence the learning process itself and the many ways in which they can be exploited.

LESSONS LEARNED AND EXAMPLES

The place of international links in vocational education and training

Colleges have responded in a wide variety of ways to the opportunities created by the development of international links but in some colleges there is still some uncertainty about the extent to which time and resources should be devoted to them. Although all colleges would consider it desirable it is not really possible to say at the present moment that all FE students will automatically experience an international or even European dimension as, although colleges have developed strategic commitments, these are often difficult to implement for the following reasons:

Absence of support and guidelines for curriculum integration

Considerable energy has been devoted to the development of a more integrated curriculum with the introduction of key skills and classroom and workplace activity being brought closer together and the gap between theory and practice narrowed. Practitioners draw on shared frameworks of best practice to achieve these through a combination of college level curriculum development with government funding and policy support. No similar effort has been made to develop support and guidelines applicable to the integration of international links. There is therefore, as yet, no shared framework as to what constitutes an integrated international dimension in the curriculum and for this reason practice is variable and in some cases 'add on' rather than properly integrated in the way that key skills or health and safety might be integrated.

Support from awarding and validating bodies

UK vocational qualifications appear to have tremendous exporting potential which government and awarding and validating bodies have been slow to recognise. Colleges have been asked to customise qualifications but awarding bodies are not always as responsive and flexible as they might be as exporters. The transferability of qualifications needs to be addressed. Awarding bodies should also consider making languages obligatory; it is possible to gain a GNVQ in Leisure and Tourism without a foreign language

Official support for globalisation of education and training

There is much discussion in the media and elsewhere about the global economy and its associated requirements for labour mobility and flexibility. This has wide implications for the content and style of delivery of vocational education and training in this country. The kinds of projects in which colleges have been involved have contributed to the establishment of some very interesting developments and deserve to be examined and fed into broader policy debates. The FEFC could contribute to this development by ensuring a more helpful approach to the proper funding of appropriate foreign language provision.

Funding international links

The colleges in the survey conveyed a strong message that international links cannot be developed without colleges providing financial support. This applies especially in the early stages of establishing links where market information and infrastructural support require an initial investment. Colleges which expect this type of work to be self-financing or income-generating from the outset are unlikely to achieve quality standards.

Colleges therefore need to allocate resources to establishing appropriate management arrangements, building international partnerships, marketing the export of the curriculum as well as to the recruiting overseas students, undertaking staff development and creating infrastructures for the support of overseas students and other aspects of international work. With these in place there is a greater likelihood of longer-term financial returns.

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Developing a professional rationale for international links

The development and delivery of international work, especially European work, is currently being undertaken in the context of wider discussions about the funding of FE. This has inevitably meant that some colleges have been attracted to international links as a source of additional income. The more professional rationale for international work has therefore received less attention. However, it is clear from the outcomes of this research that some interesting new approaches are being developed nonetheless. These include:

- building international partnership arrangements to address issues of common concern or to complement each other's provision
- the integration of international dimensions into the curriculum
- the experience of working through interpreters and in other bilingual contexts.

Alongside these, college staff are developing associated skills for operating in different socio-economic and cultural and linguistic circumstances This practice could form the basis for the establishment of recognised professional standards for international links and associated models of staff development.

Developing new ways of encouraging student mobility

Within the context of labour mobility needed to meet the demands of a global economy, it was disturbing that some colleges were experiencing difficulties in encouraging UK students to take part in international links which require international travel and placements or exchanges outside the UK. Some colleges report that the main reason is that the students involved and their families often have limited experience of international study opportunities of this type, so lack confidence. There may therefore be a need for some curriculum initiatives to enable students to gain the confidence to make the most of these opportunities. This could be done through new communication technologies, creating preliminary partnership activities with students overseas with integrated and relevant foreign language support; in other words models of virtual mobility as a preparation for real mobility.

The potential for greater use of information technology

Currently there is a great deal of official EU encouragement of the formation of European partnerships to develop and pilot models using new technologies as a tool to support the delivery of vocational education and training. Often, however, EU funding requires matched funding from the colleges themselves and colleges are increasingly finding it difficult to find the match and therefore to access these funds.

One solution, because of the scale of resources and funding required, can be seen in the trend towards colleges establishing consortium arrangements with neighbouring colleges, local industry and other stakeholders as a means of preparing tenders which makes sense in terms of scale.

Developing suitable management arrangements

In this research we have highlighted the diversity of rationale in colleges for involvement in international work and the ways in which suitable management arrangements have evolved with the growth of the work. Clearly the formalisation of these arrangements is likely to continue with a growing trend towards separate units or centres working directly to a senior manager and also a movement towards the sharing of units between colleges as has happened in Wales, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and North London.

Developing a regional focus for international links

Colleges are only one of the stakeholders in a regional strategy to increase participation in European and international labour market opportunities. The experience illustrated by the Scottish model predicated on a local regional strategy suggests there are important mutual benefits to be had from this approach.

The following are selected to show the range of different types of international activity in colleges and detailed in what follows:

Scarborough College: GNVQ Health and Social Care: Curriculum integration

With funding from Socrates, students at this College are carrying out one of their optional units in Ferrarro, Italy. The location was chosen because Ferraro has particularly well respected social care provision, and so students are able to develop a a more informed perspective from which they can analyse provision elsewhere. With preparatory language training, funded through Lingua, for which they receive accreditation as part of their additional studies students undertake a research project in Ferraro from which the outcome is a bilingual guide to Social Services in Ferraro.

Motherwell College: HNC Child Care and Nursery Nursing: Exporting the curriculum

With sponsorship from Unicef, Motherwell College delivered training in dealing with child abuse through franchise arrangements with Malaysia. Through this, they have trained Malaysian nationals to operate within a quality framework and in this way have established a presence in Malaysia.

City College, Manchester: Students with Learning Difficulties: Curriculum enhancement

As part of Manchester's friendship agreement with Cordoba in Spain, 10 students with severe learning disabilities spent three weeks working alongside gardeners in the botanical gardens as part of a work preparation programme to develop horticultural skills as well as basic and core skills in communications and personal development. This was obviously a high risk project and required careful preparation given that students need constant supervision. Two workbooks were prepared before the visit, one for the work experience element of the three-week programme and one for the social activities. The programme was integrated into the SLD curriculum of the college with its emphasis on preparation for working life. The students from this programme are now employed in full-time work in the local area.

Park Lane College, Leeds: International Business Club: Supporting local industry

With funding from their TEC and the Local Authority, Park Lane College has established an International Business Club to support the needs of local companies with an interest in establishing links in Europe and beyond. Membership is free to representatives of the local business community and members receive information about seminars, advisory services and a European newsletter. In addition, for a small fee their membership enables them to receive a monthly resource pack with information about EU legislation, funding, new proposals and support for small and medium-sized businesses. Alongside this there is a programme of monthly seminars on doing business in Europe, staff development to assist companies to identify their potential to operate in particular European markets, language and cultural sensitivity training and a young employee exchange scheme. The Business Club model has attracted interest in Eastern Europe and been adopted in Bulgaria.

Carlisle College: Overseas students

Carlisle College is working through agents in East Asia to recruit overseas students. These agents are provided with a flexible, agent's pack which promotes Carlisle as a small friendly city located close to the Lake District and Scotland without the problems associated with large urban centres. Care has been taken to establish appropriate infrastructural arrangements for the support of these students, including general and vocationally-relevant language training, pastoral support and an information centre. Students infill onto existing College provision.

Carlisle's partnership with the University of Northumbria means that these overseas students can progress readily to HE. The College is taking care to build up this overseas student market relatively slowly to ensure that support mechanisms are properly in place.

Blackburn College: Partnerships with Polish telecommunications schools: Curriculum innovation

Since 1990 Blackburn College has worked in partnership with vocational schools in the telecommunications sector in Poland, funded through Know How and Phare, to assist them to design a curriculum which is relevant to the changing industrial structures which are developing as a result of the moves towards a market economy. The approach adopted by Blackburn is to create circumstances through which Polish partners can be exposed to the experience here of making education and training responsive to industrial restructuring and to evaluate the potential for transfer to their Polish contexts.

This has resulted in the establishment of collaborative arrangements between industry and schools to support the gathering of information, by students, about the rapidly changing local labour market as well as the development of new ways of assessing learner competence. These partnerships are currently being extended to include vocational schools in Belarus.

Plymouth College: GNVQ Hospitality & Catering: Curriculum integration

In their first year students pay a short visit to a lycee in the Jura region of France. In their second year they spend a month in the lycee in both French and vocational classes then go out on a five-month placement in a hotel or restaurant. A number of past students are now working in France and Switzerland on a permanent basis.

Ridge Danyers College: Trans European Projects: Curriculum enhancement

In partnership with Northern Ireland colleges who have Objective 1 status, Ridge Danyers is involved in the creation of networks around Europe with an annual conference. Ten countries have been involved and each participant has to identify two projects each year and find partners in the network.

Filton College: Contract with a German telecommunications company: English as a foreign language

This is a contract through a British marketing company to train German managers in business English. Two groups attend each month and they combine English language training with visits to local businesses. The feedback from managers participating has shown that the course is the best quality training provision offered to managers in the company.

Warwickshire College: Water Technology Course: Exporting in a niche market

The college has run this course for 10 years for engineers from the third world, mainly from Africa, to enable them to install hand wells in villages for the first time. The tutor was able to visit Africa and see the wells in action. The college won a National Training Award for this work.

North London Colleges European Network Eurotopics: Joint student projects

Originally a Petra project, this involved all the colleges in the UK network working with colleges in three other countries to produce assignments that integrated a European dimension into the curriculum that students could undertake in any of the four countries. This involved students in the Built Environment, Business Studies, Health and Care, Informatics and Leisure and Tourism.

Appendix 1: Guidelines for international work

1. Before embarking on international work, ensure that it is included in the college's strategic plan.
2. Identify someone to lead in this area. This person should have a curriculum background and clear access to the principalship. They should be of some standing in the college.
3. Create a working group of enthusiasts, not representatives, to support the international officer. Tell the college that such a group has been formed.
4. Devise a three-year development plan that will operationalise the strategic plan.
5. Since much of the work, particularly European work, can be bureaucratic, provide secretarial support and if possible an identifiable office for the activity.
6. Produce a regular international newsletter to motivate and inform staff.
7. Ensure that language skills training is accessible to both staff and students.
8. If the recruitment of foreign students is part of the business plan, discuss with student support the establishment of an effective student support service for overseas students *before* any are recruited.
9. Acknowledge the need, and therefore the costs, of initial overseas visits to establish the right contacts.
10. Be aware of the range of international activities:
    - student exchanges
    - staff exchanges
    - recruitment of foreign students
    - e-mail and Internet activity
    - joint curriculum projects
    - exporting of programmes
    - joint research projects
    - organisation of conferences.
11. Do not spread the net too widely, too quickly.
12. When good partners are found, keep in regular contact.
13. Be patient when dealing with developing countries; it can take a long time before a recognisable outcome is achieved.
14. Keep up to date with all the funding opportunities and simplify the bidding process as far as possible for college staff leading a project.
15. Ensure there are effective financial records should auditors wish to inspect.
16. Quality is difficult to sustain when dealing with different partners in different countries so establish a robust quality assurance system.

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Appendix 2: Useful information

FEDA International Services

Coombe Lodge
Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7RG
Telephone: [01761] 462 503
Fax: [01761] 463 104
E-mail: vdavis@feda.ac.uk

Contact: Val Davis

For regular support and updating on European matters:

UK Colleges' European Network

FEDA
Coombe Lodge
Blagdon,Bristol BS40 7RG
Telephone: [01761] 462 503
Fax: [01761] 463 104
E-mail: vdavis@feda.ac.uk

Contact: Val Davis

For helpful advice, particularly for activities outside Europe:

The British Council

Medlock Street,
Manchester M15 4AA
Telephone: [0161] 957 7210
E-mail: susan.rawlinson@britcounc.org
Contact: Susan Rawlinson

For advice on exporting education:

The Department of Trade and Industry

Kingsgate House
66-74 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6SW
Telephone: [0171] 215 5000

Contact: Richard Carter

For advice on European funding (Leonardo):

The Central Bureau

10 Spring Gardens
London SW1A 2BN
Telephone: [0171] 389 4004
Contact: Dawn Long

For European networking:

The European Forum of Vocational Education and Training (EFVET)

FE Office for West Midlands
Matthew Boulton College
Conybere Street, Birmingham B12 0YL
Telephone: [0121] 446 3403
Contact: Jo Clough (Secretary)

The American Association of Community Colleges

1740 N Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
USA

For advice on the European Social Fund contact the European Officer at your Regional Government Office.

For training and consultancy for college development of European Activities contact:

The Europanel

FEDA
Coombe Lodge
Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7RG
Telephone: [01761] 462 503
Fax: [01761]463 104
E-mail: vdavis@feda.ac.uk

Contact: Val Davis

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31

FE matters

The world is getting smaller as global communications improve. There is a worldwide trend towards competence based qualifications in which the UK is a world leader. Colleges need to prepare their students for the global economy and make the most of their valuable expertise. Based on a survey of the whole sector and a close examination of a network of colleges, two sixth form colleges, urban and rural colleges, and a college in Scotland, this report offers

- a summary of the current situation
- details of good practice from 11 colleges
- guidelines for international work
- details of useful organisations

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